GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

FOLLOW ME MEN

A flight of two HRS-3 helos departed its home field on a scheduled flight to the island of Kauai, a total of 115 miles distant and 82 miles overwater from the island of Oahu.

All emergency equipment carried in the helos for the overwater hop had been checked and emergency procedures reviewed prior to departure.

They departed Kaena Point at about 0810 (no one kept a log and estimates varied) and headed out to sea on a heading of 300°, cruising at 1500 feet. The weather was good, with excellent visibility and scattered clouds. As they progressed, the forecasted scattered rain showers appeared and increased in number. Visibility dropped to one to three miles. A strong crosswind from the right gave the two aircraft an estimated 10° left drift and heading was corrected to compensate for it. The LF/MDF was turned on and an attempt made to pick up an aural null on the Port Allen homer. There was too much static, although it came in loud and clear on the antenna position. The ARA-25 UHF/ADF was tuned to the LIHUE Omni station frequency but they were obviously out of range and so continued on course.

At about 0930 the flight leader decided they were south of Kauai Island and turned to a heading of 030°. The other HRS blindly followed. They were now well past a reasonable ETA.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to call LIHUE Omni on button 16 UHF. This was marked on the frequency card as 257.8, civil control towers. Lihue does not guard this channel. None of the four pilots checked the RADFACS for the proper frequency.

Finally the flight leader switched to UHF Guard channel and broadcast a request for a "radio check" with any aircraft in hearing range. A Coast Guard RSD, airborne over Oahu, heard their call, ascertained their trouble,

alerted the SAR units and, taking UHF/DF bearings on the helo transmissions, proceeded in their direction. Within a few minutes the Coast Guard aircraft determined their position to be north or east of Kauai and directed the helos to take up a course of 250° magnetic. By 1015 it was determined that they were 70 miles due north of Kauai and they were directed to take a course of 180° magnetic. Visual contact was established in a short time and a total of five SAR aircraft were soon circling overhead. Help was requested too late however, for the two HRS-3s were forced by imminent fuel exhaustion to ditch just 20 miles north of the Kauai coast in 1900 fathoms of water. Rafts and equipment were dropped by the SAR aircraft and within an hour rescue helicopters arrived to pick up all hands.

Investigation after the accident revealed: There was absolutely no preflight planning by any of the four pilots involved.

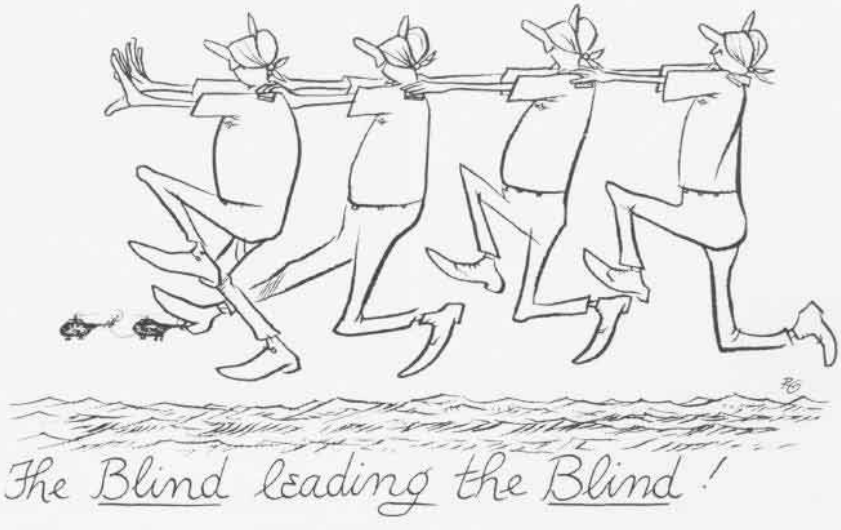
The only navigation publication utilized was the Radio Facility Chart.

No WAC, strip, or other type charts were used, and none of the pilots had a navigation computer.

There was no DR plot or inflight log maintained at any time.

The DD175 was not signed by the flight leader and only one pilot attended the weather briefing. This was not the flight leader.

The DD175 stated the helos had 4 plus 30 fuel aboard. One ditched after 3 plus 23 hrs and the other after



3 plus 56. At no time did any of the pilots actually measure the distance from coast to coast, and no base course, drift correction, or ETA of landfall was computed. Not one of the pilots could offer a definite time that they expected to reach land. Their intentions and instructions were simply to "follow the leader."

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Jumpin' Jupiter! These guys must of had their brains purged out! Kinda reminds me of the pilot who preferred the oil company road maps. There's enough instructions published by CNO and all the Fleet commands on the duties of a flight leader and each pilot's individual responsibilities for flight planning and navigation to darn near pave the route these dodos attempted to travel.

They had PLENTY of radio navigation equipment aboard the HRS-3s. Course its just CARGO if you don't use it!

Their life insurance companies have a bunch of bad risks on their hands.

Good men are hard to find.
When leaving the chocks,
don't shot peen your line man!

Pistol Packin' Pilot

Soon after a night catapult launch and just under a 2000-foot broken cloud layer, an A4D pilot was forced to eject when his aircraft went into what appeared to be uncontrollable left rolls. Because of the low altitude there had been little time to try much in the way of recovery measures and no "Mayday" call had been made.

The seat and 'chute worked perfectly but as he swung in the harness while descending he began to worry about no one knowing of his ejection. Deciding to signal before the ships went by, he pulled his unloaded .38 cal. pistol from his shoulder holster, removed his gloves and put them in his G-suit pocket. He was attempting to load the pistol in the darkness when he suddenly realized the water was getting pretty close. Shoving the pistol back in the holster, he stuck the cartridge in his mouth, grabbed the rocket jet fasteners on each parachute riser and hit the water almost immediately.

He was able to release the right fastener, but not the left, and since there was a 30-knot wind, he found himself being dragged through seven-foot waves on his back. He swallowed some salt water and was beginning to panic when he finally got the left riser fastener to release. After taking a few quick gulps of air and inflating his MK3C life vest, he followed his life raft lanyard down to the inflation bottle. There was no toggle on the bottle, so he raised the aluminum lever, and the raft, to his immense relief, started to inflate. Although it only partially inflated, he decided to climb in anyway.

Something was wrapped around his legs, and he was forced to cut himself free with his survival knife. He then climbed into the raft and inflated it with the oral inflation tube!

Still working hard at survival, he loaded five rounds in his pistol and fired them off at about two minute intervals.

Seeing a destroyer heading his way, he started to reload, but was unable to eject the expended cartridges from the cylinder. Looking up, he noted that the rescue vessel was closing at a startlingly high rate of speed. Fortunately, he put the pistol back in the holster and decided to await a more opportune time to reload, for the destroyed went roaring by at about two feet and flipped pilot, raft, and all, end over end!

After struggling back into the raft, the pilot loaded the remaining empty chamber and fired his pisol once again. Alert look-outs on the destroyer spotted the tracer. As the ship heeled over in a fast turn, the now weary pilot decided not to take any more chances, put away his pistol and fired a flare from his life vest. The destroyer came alongside, one of the ship's officers dove into the heavy seas with a line and he was helped aboard, safe at last.

Grampaw Pettibone says:

Sufferin' catfish! This feller really had a pistol fixation, but it DID save his bacon! Dozens of people saw the tracers, but he was firing them at such an angle no one really pinpointed him.

The survival equipment officer in this squadron better get with it! The .38 cartridges were corroded, hence wouldn't eject, the raft had no toggle, and the pilot obviously hadn't had enough "dry runs" on use of his survival gear. There are some procedures you MUST follow prior to water entry if you're gonna have a chance at survival. You've got to KNOW your survival gear to use it properly!

Ever try blowing up a life raft by the oral inflation tube while you're sitting in it? It's a killer, believe me!